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THE NEGRO AND THE SPANISH PIONEER IN THE NEW WORLD

Negro slaves probably made their first appearance in the New World in 1502. Those who came in the beginning were Christians and personal servants of masters who had acquired them in Spain, but soon afterwards, thanks to the influence of the religious order of *Predicadores* and of the more famous Las Casas, they began to be introduced directly from Africa, in order that the sufferings of the Indians who were dying out under the Spanish system of forced labor might be alleviated.¹ By the close of the second decade of the sixteenth century no inconsiderable number had been brought over, and a perusal of the early accounts of the exploits of the *Conquistadores* will reveal the fact that the Negro participated in the exploration and occupation of nearly every important region from New Mexico to Chile. As personal attendants of the Spanish Pioneers, as burden-bearers and drudges connected with exploration and the founding of colonies, they played an indispensable though inconspicuous rôle in one of the greatest achievements which history records. Such accounts of their service as have been preserved are, for the most part, accidental: only when he performed an act of unusual heroism or connected himself with a strange or humorous occurrence was the Negro's name placed alongside of that of his Spanish master where it is destined to remain for all time.

When Balboa set out from Darién on the tour of exploration which resulted in the discovery of the South Sea, at least one Negro, Nuflo de Olano, was numbered in his party. Three years later, when the timbers for the four boats with which he intended to explore the Pacific had been prepared, thirty Negroes were among those who carried them piece

¹ José Antonio Saco, *Historia de la Esclavitud* . . . (Barcelona, 1879), IV, 57ff.

by piece over mountain and jungle from Acla to San Miguel. Moreover, when Balboa's successor constructed the first highway from ocean to ocean he made use of Negro labor along with that of the Indian.²

Hernán Cortés carried with him from Cuba not only Indian servants but Negro slaves who helped to drag along the artillery which he used to strike mortal terror into the Indians of Mexico. There has been preserved a list of those who set out on this famous expedition, and among the names are those of two Negroes, one of whom Saco claims to have been the first to sow and reap small grain in Mexico. Moreover, two Negroes were among the company sent out by Velásquez in 1520 to punish Cortés for his insubordination. One of these has the unenviable distinction of having introduced smallpox among the Mexican Indians. The other, who seems to have observed the fight between the men of the agent of Velásquez (Narváez) from the safe and comfortable distance of a neighboring tree, has, because of some witty and flattering remarks which he made to Cortés, received the honor of a paragraph in the *Decades* of Herrera.³

It is not definitely known whether Pedro de Alvarado, one of the bravest and most gallant lieutenants of Cortés, carried Negroes with him into Guatemala in 1523, but it is certain that eleven years later, when his ambition and love of gain led him to fit out that ill-fated expedition to Quito, he saw fit to include in the company two hundred black slaves, most of whom perished while making their way through the blinding snows of the Andes.⁴

It is certain, moreover, that several Negroes were along with the *Conquistadores* of Perú and Chile. The contract of Francisco Pizarro permitted him to introduce fifty Negroes into Perú free of duty; and even before this, Negroes had accompanied those who had spied out the land.

² Saco, *op. cit.*, IV, 74, 75, 178; Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, *Historia General* . . . tom. 3, lib. 29, cap. 3.

³ Dec. 2, lib. 10, cap. 4; Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *Conquista de Nueva-Espana*, cap. 124.

⁴ Herrera, dec. 5, lib. 5, cap. 7-9.

In 1525, when Diego de Almagro effected a landing near the port of Quemado, on the west coast of South America, and attempted to penetrate the adjacent country, he encountered rather severe opposition from the Indians of the section. During the resulting skirmish one of his eyes was crushed by a dart and he was saved from captivity and death only by the valiant succor of his Negro slave. A year later, the debarkation of a Spaniard and his slave at Tumbez resulted in an amusing occurrence which once more gave the Negro a few brief sentences in the *Decades*. Astonished at the color of his face, the natives of the region had him wash time after time in order to see if the black would disappear; and the Negro, true to his good nature and love of a joke, complied willingly while he grinned so as to display his pearly white teeth.⁵

Several Negroes assisted the Yanaconas Indians in carrying the baggage of Diego de Almagro and Rodrigo Orgoñez during their perilous journey along the frozen Andes from Cuzco to Chile; and many of them perished on the way.⁶ Moreover, upon at least one occasion the forces of the great conqueror of Chile, Pedro Valdivia himself, would probably have been destroyed, had it not been for the cool-headed alertness of Captain Gonzalo de los Rios and a Negro who managed to procure the saddle-horses of the Spaniards as soon as they saw a band of Indians dart from their hiding places.⁷

Numerous African slaves were along with the Spanish pioneers in Venezuela. Ortal, Sedeño, and Heredia each had permission to introduce one hundred Negroes to build fortresses and search for mines; and in 1537, when the licentiate Vadillo came to Cartagena to hold the residencia of Heredia, he brought down a large number who later accompanied him on the luckless excursions which he undertook apparently in the hope of finding the mines of Perú.⁸

⁵ Dec. 3, lib. 10, cap. 5.

⁶ Herrera, *op. cit.*, dec. 5, lib. 10, cap. 1, 2, y 3.

⁷ Saco, *op. cit.* IV, 166.

⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, 170.

But of all the members of the colored race who accompanied the Spaniards upon their explorations in the New World, it may be doubted whether any played so conspicuous a part as did Estevánico, or Estévan, an Arabian black from Azamor, in Morocco, and the slave of Andrés Dorantes de Carranza. He was a member and one of the survivors of the ill-fated expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez which went to pieces somewhere on the southern coast of the United States, (1528). For six years he was a captive and slave among the Indians of Texas where, in company with others of the expedition who had escaped with their lives, he effected miraculous cures. He was one of the three companions of Cabeza de Vaca on his historic journey across the continent from the Gulf of Mexico to Culiacán. From Culiacán he accompanied De Vaca and his companions to Mexico City, where he was honored by being made the slave of the viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza.

Surely these were rare and noteworthy experiences for a member of the black race, but still greater things awaited Estévan. He was destined ere he met his tragic fate to accompany the expedition which resulted in the discovery of New Mexico and Arizona. The party which, besides the Negro, consisted of three Spaniards—Fray Marcos de Niza, a lay brother, and Fray Onorato—and several Pima Indians, set out from Culiacán on March 7, 1539. They were in search of the famed Seven Cities.

After proceeding northward several days, Fray Marcos decided to rest while he dispatched the Negro to reconnoiter. He directed Estévan to advance to the north several leagues, and in case he discovered indications of a rich and populous country, to return in person or await his coming, sending back, by some of the Pimas who were to accompany him, a cross the size of which should be in proportion to the importance of the information gained. Four days passed, and then the messengers of Estévan returned bearing a cross "as high as a man" and the news that the Negro had discovered "the greatest thing in the world." Fray

Marcos hastened to follow in the footsteps of Estévan hoping to overtake him soon, but his efforts were vain. The dusky adventurer could not resist the temptation to proceed and win for himself the honor of conquering the rich country.

This country concerning which such glowing reports had reached Estévan was none other than the land of the Pueblo Indians. His procedure after separating from Fray Marcos is thus narrated by a contemporary, though not an eye-witness:

“ After Estevan had left the friars, he thought he could get all the reputation and honor himself, and that if he should discover these settlements with such famous high houses, alone, he would be considered bold and courageous. So he proceeded with the people who had followed him, and attempted to cross the wilderness which lies between the country he had passed through and Cibola, . . . [He] reached Cibola loaded with the large quantity of turquoises they [the Indians along the route] had given him and some beautiful women whom the Indians who followed him and carried his things were taking with them and had given him. These had followed him from all the settlements he had passed, believing that under his protection they could traverse the whole world without any danger. But as the people in this country were more intelligent than those who followed Estevan, they lodged him in a little hut they had outside their village, and the older men and governors heard his story and took steps to find out the reason he had come to that country. The account which the Negro gave them of two white men who were following him, sent by a great lord, who knew about the things in the sky, and how these were coming to instruct them in divine matters, made them think that he must be a spy or a guide from some nations who wished to come and conquer them, because it seemed to them unreasonable to say that the people were white in the country from which he came and that he was sent by them, he being black. Besides these other reasons,

they thought it was hard of him to ask them for turquoises and women, and so they decided to kill him. They did this, but they did not kill any of those who went with him. . . .”⁹

From this and other contemporary sources, Lowery¹⁰ has constructed a more complete and lively picture of Estévan’s last days. Lowery says that “he travelled with savage magnificence, gaily dressed with bells and feathers fastened about his arms and legs. He carried with him a gourd decorated with bells and two feathers, one white and the other red. This gourd he sent before him by messengers as a symbol of authority and to command obedience, as he had seen successfully done in the western part of Texas, when in company with Cabeza de Vaca. . . . As soon as they had delivered the gourd to the chief [of the pueblo] and he had observed the bells he became very angry,” and ordered Estévan and his party to depart at once. But the Negro was persistent. He and his retinue lodged just outside the walls of the Pueblo of Hawaikuh. Early the next morning they were attacked by a large band of warriors from the Pueblo and Estévan was killed while attempting to make his escape.

There has been preserved among the legends of the Zuñi Pueblos of New Mexico one which apparently dates back to the coming of Estévan, the Black Mexican from the south. The scene of his death is placed at Kiakima, and the single Black Mexican has been magnified into many, but the legend is nevertheless interesting and significant.

“It is to be believed that a long time ago, when roofs lay over the walls of Kya-ki-me, when smoke hung over the housetops, and the ladder rounds were still unbroken in Kya-ki-me, then the Black Mexicans came from their abodes in Everlasting Summerland. One day, unexpectedly, out of Hemlock Cañon they came, and descended to Kya-ki-me. But when they said they would enter the covered way, it

⁹ Pedro de Castañeda, “Account of the Expedition to Cibola which took place in the year 1540 . . .,” translated in *Spanish Explorers in the Southern United States* (J. F. Jameson, ed.), pp. 289–290.

¹⁰ *Spanish Settlements in the United States, 1513–1561*, pp. 278–280.

seems that our ancients looked not gently at them; for with these Black Mexicans came many Indians of So-no-li, as they call it now, . . . who were enemies of our ancients. Therefore, these our ancients, being always bad-tempered, and quick to anger, made fools of themselves after their fashion, rushing into their town and out of their town, shouting, skipping and shooting with their sling-stones and arrows and tossing their war-clubs. Then the Indians of So-no-li set up a great howl, and thus they and our ancients did much ill to one another. Then and thus was killed by our ancients, right where the stone stands down by the arroyo of Kya-ki-me, one of the Black Mexicans, a large man, with chilli lips [*i.e.*, lips swollen from eating chilli peppers], and some of the Indians they killed, catching others. Then the rest ran away, chased by our grand-fathers, and went back toward their country in the Land of Everlasting Summer. . . .'¹¹

J. FRED RIPPY.

¹¹ Quoted in Lowery, *op. cit.*, pp. 281-282.